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Comments:

Greetings,

I have just learned about the potential for the King Mountain area to be included in a new Wilderness designation.

This brings me great concern.

I have been an active Hang Glider pilot since 1976. The flights I have enjoyed from the King Mountain launch site have been nothing less than spectacular. While I have enjoyed the privilege to launch and fly from many locations around the USA, most of them wonderful, None compare to King Mountain. Flights from King Mountain are always immensely beautiful, and more often than not, truly world class in terms of soaring conditions and flight potential. My most profound and deeply satisfying flights have been at King Mountain, and always with the best people from our small community of free-flight.

The competition/ race that was held at King Mountain for many years was always a highlight of my summer. I hope the event returns, so that I and many others, newcomers to our sport, can experience the incredible soaring opportunities that King Mountain and the surrounding areas provide, with the company of so many like minded folks.

Likewise, individual access to the site, is always enjoyed.

Additionally, hiking and mountain biking also have provided wonderful recreation options for us while in the area on days that we chose not to fly, or simply wanted to enjoy the area at a different pace.

The local communities, residents, and their businesses always seem welcoming of us visitors.

While I am generally a very strong advocate of Wilderness designation status, I take exception with King Mountain. My reason being, that access for Hang Gliding and Paragliding in such a unique location is a very limited resource privilege and opportunity. With the existing road, no additional or significant 'enhancement' needs to be made to sustain access. There are very very few similar access opportunities in the USA for free flight launch access, and fewer yet with such favorable geographical, meteorological, and social resources.

IF Wilderness designation were to be assigned to this area, I will strongly urge the decision-makers to provide exception for limited access to free flight pilots and their support in a tightly controlled way,

To loose access to this area for the purpose of free flight would be a significant blow to the present international free flight community, as well as eliminate this opportunity and privilege for all newcomers in the future.

Finally, to close access to King Mountain for free flight participants would not be unlike closing a sacred temple of a deeply emotional culture.

The past, present, and future participants of this unique activity have engaged in significant experiences involving the development of advancing science, athleticism, competitive sport, emotional enlightenment, and social enhancement. And, these positive elements have surely extended beyond the flying community.

Thanks for listening. And thanks in advance for maintaining access for free-flight participants to King Mountain.

Sincerely,

Richard Siberell